DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 151 CS 210 484

AUTHOR Coleman, Eve B.
TITLE An Ethnographic Description of the Development of Basic Writers' Revision Skills.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 42p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Curriculum Development; Higher Education; Peer Evaluation; *Revision (Written Composition); Teacher Education; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Basic Writing; Teacher Student Conferences

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify patterns in the development of college basic writers' revision skills which could have implications for curriculum development and teacher training. The questions addressed were: (1) What instructional and/or other experiences aimed at improving revision skills do basic writers perceive as promoting meaning-making changes from draft to draft? and (2) Were the students' perceptions of what prompted those changes substantiated by evidence of changes? Five college level basic writing students kept learning logs and produced five assigned papers in stages: prewriting, drafting, incorporating feedback from the teacher and other students, revising, and final editing. Response groups provided peer input in the early draft stages. Subjects were interviewed at intervals throughout the semester about their learning logs, attitudes, and what prompted changes in their papers from draft to draft. Researchers analyzed transcripts of response group sessions by comparing them to written drafts and determined that the students were developing revision awareness that was not yet influencing their writing. Several patterns of growth in writing skill and revision ability gradually emerged, and these patterns suggested an increase in the subjects' writing confidence and their ability to monitor their own writing. Subjects also identified peer response groups and student/teacher conferences as the most helpful classroom activities. (Transcripts of peer response sessions and 24 references are included.) (AEW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED283151

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

An Ethnographic Description of the Development of Basic Writers' Revision Skills

Eve B. Coleman

Baptist College at Charleston

Address: Six Avon Court

Charleston, SC 29407

Phone: (803) 766-0968 or 797-4226

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Eve B. Coleman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS210494

Running Head: ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION BASIC WRITERS' REVISION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This study describes the developing revision practices of five basic college writers. One goal of the study was to describe patterns in the development of basic writers' revision skills which could have implications for curriculum development and teacher training. The study employs ethnographic and text analysis techniques to gather and analyze data. Operating as a teacher-researcher, the investigator analyzed interviews, response group sessions, learning logs, and student drafts. Findings revealed indicators of writing growth as evidenced by: an increasing ability to self-monitor writing; movement from writer-based to reader-based texts; and an increasing awareness of the need to make meaning-advancing changes as a part of revision. Also, students perceived peer response groups and student/teacher conferences as the most helpful classroom activities. The study yielded a rare glimpse of how improving a skill as personal and elusive as writing unfolded for five students, along with possibilities for future research in the area of research methodology and classroom practices.

An Ethnographic Description of the Development of Basic Writers' Revision Skills

During the past ten years many studies have been conducted to describe the composing processes of both experienced and inexperienced writers (Bridwell, 1980; Emig, 1979; Faigley & Witte, 1981; Flower, 1979; Perl, 1979; Sommers, 1980). These studies have demonstrated that composing practices of competent writers and inexperienced writers vary in such features as the degree of self-monitoring the writers exhibit (Flower, 1979) and the degree to which writers' texts are writer-based or reader-based (Hayes and Flower, 1980). Other studies have shown that the types of revisions experienced and inexperienced writers make vary greatly. As a part of the increased interest in the area of revision, some researchers have developed text analysis instruments to determine the types of revisions which writers make (Bridwell, 1980; Faigley & Witte, 1981). According to the research done by Faigley and Witte using their own revision taxonomy, inexperienced writers tend to make only surface changes when they revise, while experienced writers make more meaning-advancing changes (1981).

While studies such as the ones cited above have described what revision strategies are employed by both inexperienced and experienced writers, not enough is known about the acquisition or development of revision skills during a period of direct instruction. For example, how does the shift from making only surface changes to making meaning-advancing changes occur? One

level of instruction where the development of revision skills can be observed as it unfolds is in basic college writing classes. The students who are enrolled in Basic Writing courses at colleges and universities across the country are easy to identify. However, as Bartholomae (1980) states, "We know little about their performance as writers, beyond the bald fact that they fail to do what other, conventionally successful writers do" (p. 253). Yet exit tests show that many of these basic writers improve their writing enough to enter the mainstream of college writing.

The study described here was designed to describe the development of the revision skills of basic writers within the context of a set of instructional experiences which occurred during a one-semester writing course. When basic writers enter a writing course, the steps in their writing processes are distorted, as if they were appearing in a "house of mirrors." It is not that all the pieces are not there; rather, the pieces are distorted. A portrait of the writing process and, hence, its resulting product, of a basic writer looks very different at the beginning of instruction than it does at the end of a period of instruction. That much has been verified (Bartholomae, 1980). But analyzing student texts before and after instruction does not explain what <u>happens</u> to those writers during instruction. The study described here was designed to enable the present researcher to follow a group of basic writers as they made their way through and out of the distorted house of mirrors of their developing revision skills.

The two questions which this study set out to address were:

1. What instructional and/or other experiences aimed at improving revision skills do basic writers perceive as promoting meaning-advancing changes from draft to draft of assigned writing?

2. Are the students' perceptions of the experiences which prompted them to make meaning-advancing changes substantiated by evidence of changes?

Design and Procedures

Introduction

The design of this study relied upon qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, with findings reported in the form of a description. The methods of investigation were consistent with those of other researchers who have attempted to describe the writing process as it unfolds through various combinations of observations, interviews, and verbal protocols resulting in case studies (Kantor, et. al., 1981). In this study, interviews and observations conducted by a participant-observer followed established ethnographic procedures. A second method, discourse analysis was also used. Bridwell (1980) is one of the few researchers to fuse both lines of inquiry. Because of the promise of the fusion for increasing the validity of composition research, both ethnographic research techniques and discourse analysis were used in the present study.

Two features of the methodology used in this study vary

slightly from most other studies of its type. First of all, the present study describes the revision practices of basic writers in the context of a classroom setting where they were learning revision techniques. Therefore, the study was designed to provide a description of revision skills as they developed and to account for the techniques which fostered that development. The present researcher chose to study her own students within the context of her own classroom in order to overcome a serious limitation of previous studies of revision, "the artificiality of the writing situation" (Faigley & Witte, 1981, p. 411).

Another feature of this study that is slightly different from others of its type is its reliance on student learning logs. In addition to ethnographic techniques of interview and observation, the present study relied upon student learning log entries for gathering information about the thought processes of the participants in the production of their written discourse. As Diesing (1983) suggests, if the population under study is literate, a sample of writing is a valuable addition to the researchers data base. In ethnographic terms, this study is called a triangulating research design, which involves using "a variety of strategies to reduce threats to reliability and validity (LeCompe and Goetz, 1982, p. 55).

Selection of Sample (Participants)

Five participants were chosen from a one semester Basic Writing course. Students were placed in Basic Writing as a result of the college's placement essay. While most of the findings

reported here are based only on the five participants, some data were collected and analyzed from the entire class as well as another section of the course. The following criteria were used to select thee five participants:

1) Participants had to be enrolled in the writing class for the first time. No one repeating the course was considered as a candidate for participation.

2) Those asked to participate were not the weakest writers, nor were they necessarily the best writers in the class. They were students whose diagnostic writing samples had characteristics similar to those of students who had previously benefited from the type of instruction given in the writing class.

3) Willingness to participate.

A cross-section of students was chosen. The breakdown was as follows: Three males, one white and two black. One white female and one black female. Three of the five were dormitory students, while two lived off campus. Four students were in-state students, and one was from a state several hundred miles away.

Data Collection and Analysis

The five participants followed the same instructional sequence as the rest of the writing class. Students in the writing class developed five assigned papers in stages: prewriting, drafting, receiving responses from teacher and students, revising previous draft(s), and final editing. The theory upon which this class operated is summarized by Bridwell (1880), who describes the writing process as both linear and recursive. While the steps in

the writing process were undertaken in a linear sequence, a great deal of back and forth motion was expected between each step.

Interviews. Participants were interviewed at intervals during the semester about their revisions, their learning logs, and their attitudes toward and knowledge of revision. Most interviews were conducted with only one participant at a time; however, two of the interviews were conducted with pairs of participants. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the present researcher. Ethnographic interview techniques prescribed by Spradley (1979) and suggested by Pollard (1983) were used to collect and analyze audio-taped records of interviews.

Interviews were a major source for determining what activities or knowledge the students perceived as having advanced the meaning of their drafts. To this end, interviews were scheduled shortly after each major paper was completed. Participants were asked in the interview sessions to look at early drafts of papers and compare them to their final drafts. For every change mentioned, the present researcher asked questions which led the participant to try to recall what caused the changes. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed for recurring themes or topics that might have emerged in more than one data source.

Analysis of Student Papers. An adaptation of the Faigley/Witte Revision Taxonomy (1981) was used to analyze first and final drafts for the first and last assigned papers.

Response Groups. Two student response groups sessions were audio-taped. Response groups were used in the participants'

writing class as a means of providing peer feedback of early drafts. Students, using guidelines provided by the teacher, were encouraged to give each other suggestions on possible revisions that would advance the meaning of the student texts. After hearing the responses of peers, students decided which suggestions to use in future drafts.

The present researcher set out to analyze the transcripts of response groups by comparing them to written drafts. But as she listened to and read the transcripts of what the participants were saying she was struck by the fact that the students were, indeed, developing revision skills that were not yet obvious in written drafts. This was not surprising in light of what is known about the difficulty of measuring growth in writing over a short period of time (Graves, 1981). Yet the participant-observer suspected that students were developing an awareness of the need to make meaning-advancing as opposed to the surface changes described by Faigley & Witte (1981). The participants were displaying the kind of "dissonance" which Sommers (1980) found competent writers capitalize on to advance the meaning of their texts. The next question was, how could the present researcher document the kind of growth that was evident to her in the response group transcripts?

The answer to determining whether or not indicators of growth could be found in the transcripts of response group tapes was to use the Faigley/Witte revision taxonomy (1981) in a new way. The present researcher employed the revision taxonomy she was using to

analyze student texts as a means to analyze the types of comments the students made to one another. She later used interviews and observations to corroborate what the analysis of response groups by the Faigley/Witte taxonomy revealed.

Learning Logs. When Pollard (1983) stated, "Asking writers to consider, in retrospect, what they have done and why, is one technique researchers may use to probe further into the process of composing ," (p. 14), she was referring to the value of interviews. However, there is another technique researchers can use to elicit what Murray (1982) calls "retrospective articulation." That method involves having students keep learning logs.

Members of the class under study kept learning logs in which they responded to their own writing processes and perceived progress, detailed their thoughts and feelings about each paper as it was produced, and in which they had the opportunity to "think" on paper about their writing. Learning logs constituted a valuable source for uncovering the cognitive processes students went through as they learned revision skills. The logs were also a valuable source for analyzing the types of revisions students were considering as the semester progressed. The logs, which were written during class time, were analyzed for evidence of students' awareness of the need to consider meaning-advancing revisions in their writing as well as surface revisions.

Field Notes. During the semester, the participant-observer kept a journal in which she recorded field notes. In addition to

her observations about the participants and the other students, the present researcher attempted to describe some of her own behaviors that may have contributed to assisting students in learning to revise.

Summary of the Findings

Analysis of the data collected in this study revealed several patterns which indicate the students' growth in their writing skill and, more specifically, growth in their revision awareness and ability. The patterns suggest a gradual increase in the students' confidence in their ability to write, brought about by the gradual improvement in their skill in writing. Evidence of this improvement emerged in the participants' use of "dissonance" (Sommers, 1980) as a stimulus for revising; their increasing ability to self-monitor their writing; and their increasing move from the production of reader-based to writer-based text (Flower, 1981). The data also suggest that certain instructional experiences accounted for the students' increased confidence and skill in writing, particularly peer response groups and teacher/student mini-conferences.

Changes in Revision Behaviors

Results of the present study revealed that the five participants, as well as the other students in the class under study, did change their perceptions of what writers do when they revise.

Learning Log Entry 3. During the second week of the course, students were asked to complete a learning log entry which

revealed a great deal about their revision behavior prior to direct instruction. The prompt for the following entries was to "Describe your Writing Process." This entry was the first opportunity the students had to begin to think of writing as a process. For many, this was a new idea. Of the twenty-eight students who responded to the prompt, not one student mentioned the actual word, "revision," or even the word, "editing." However, nine of the students did make some type of reference to revision, or more frequently, to editing. That left nineteen who made no reference at all to the kinds of changes competent writers make as they work through a piece of writing. Of the nine students who referred to some type of revision, most were really describing the final editing. Samples of these references are:

-look for errors in grammar

-read it over to make sure it sounds good and that the punctuation is right

-after I finish I proofread

-rewrite it so it will look neat

-if I make mistakes I will rewrite it

Learning Log Entry 4. This entry was made during the production of the first major paper. Without really explaining what she meant by revision, the teacher passed out red pens to the class (Bridwell, 1980), and asked the students to "revise" their papers. At the following class session, she asked the students to respond in their logs to "the sequence of writing steps (prewriting, drafting, revising,) they had gone through for the

past three class meetings." They were also asked to "reflect on the question, 'what is revision?'" Kay, one of the participants wrote:

> I thought what is she doing? I don't know what my mistakes are. I thought that's why were in here is to learn what are mistakes are. I think revision is reread what you wrote and see what simple mistakes are. To see if we could pick out our mistakes. To see if we know what we're doing.

Another student in the class wrote:

> When I revise I go threw the entire paper to find all of the mistakes I've made and then I rewrite the paper.

These students' attitudes toward revising were representative of many of the other basic writers's attitudes early in the semester. However, some students, in writing this entry seemed to be discovering where the teacher planned to lead them. One student wrote:

> Revising is correcting the errors in your paper. It could be just making your paper better. Making a better paper altogether.

Analysis of Paper One by Taxonomy. The first paper was analyzed arter students had followed a sequence similar to that used by Bridwell in her research (1980). The students were led through some prewriting, drafting, and revising, with limited guidance. As would be expected with basic writers early in the

semester, an analysis of the papers substantiated the finding of Faigley and Witte (1981), who found that inexperienced writers tend to make more surface revision than any other type. None of the participants under study made even one Macrostructure change. Revision for these students clearly equated with surface-level changes at this point in the semester.

Revision Emphasis Begins. The first paper was developed with little help from the teacher in order to establish baseline data. Once that sequence was completed, the semester began in earnest. Instruction over the next few class meetings centered around the writing process, and particularly revision. One whole class period was devoted to a discussion of revision, using the text (Dawe & Dornan, 1984) as a reference for the students. A new catch-phrase was introduced into the class, "showing, not telling, " based on the completion of some activities suggested by other writing teachers (Friss, 1982; Caplan, 1982). Another catch-phrase for the class became "zero-draft," based on the teacher's reading to the class from an article by Donald Murray (1982, p. 68).

Response Group One. Several activities were conducted to prepare students for the kinds of comments that could help other writers with their papers in subsequent drafts. All of the participants were assigned

to the same response group.

Analysis of the transcript of the first response group session by means of the Faigley/Witte (1981) taxonomy revealed that after less than a month of instruction, students were developing an awareness of the need for meaning-advancing, as well as for surface-level changes in the papers they were hearing. Examples of meaning-advancing suggestions made during the session are as follow:

-elaborate more about the store
-he has to have some main area to focus on
-maybe it's too broad
-he talked too much about certain things
-yeah, you have to describe some more here
-how do you think you could elaborate more on it?
-talk more about the atmosphere
-you've got to say specifically how the store was decorated nicely
-describe the owner
-describe his personality
-not enough details
-not enough information
-didn't capture all the details of the

place

-has to put her thoughts into a clearer view

-I'm describing too much. I've got to describe more on one area.

-do you think she told more than showed about the details?

-I think you need to show more of the place rather than tell

-she could show more

First Round of Interviews. The first round of interviews gave the participant-observer an opportunity to explore further the change in perceptions of revision in the writing process (T. refers to the teacher and the J., G., S., K., and R. refer respectively to the participants, John, Gerald, Salli, Kay, and Ronnie).

John

T. When I first gave you that red pen and told you to revise, what did you do?

J. I just thought you meant to look over and see if you want to change anything or add anything or if we did anything wrong--like skip words or misspell--mistakes?

T. You see revision as mistakes?

J. Yeah...Next paper, besides looking for mistakes, I'll try to show instead of telling. The first paper I told too much. I need more details.

Gerald

From the very beginning of the semester G. had a sense that revision was more than correcting surface errors; yet, he still talked about revision as "finding mistakes" in the interview below.

T. I'm trying to find out more about how students revise...I'm trying to know what it's like on the other side.. I'm trying to find out what it is that makes a difference in revision.

G. Well, I think revisions are necessary because sometimes when you write a paper when you first write your first draft of the paper you think about things and you write them down. Later on you might think about something you want to add or delete and by going back and rereading the paper you'll be able to find your mistakes and even correct your mistakes. If you have a new thought or idea you can put it in your paper.

T. Had you thought about this much before this semester?

G. No, not really. I always thought before I came to college, really, I enjoyed writing, but I always thought that after I finished my first copy that was it and then it was up to my teacher to find my mistakes.

T. To edit for you in a way?

G. Uh huh. I didn't think it was my job to do that.

During the first round of interviews all of the participants made comments similar to the ones above, which indicated that they were already beginning to change their perceptions of what it meant

to revise.

Response Group Session Two. By the time the second major paper had been drafted and was ready for peer reaction, the participants were well aware that response group time was not to be spent on surface-level suggestions. The pattern of spending the last class before a paper was due working on editing considerations had been established, so the participants knew they could focus on other condsiderations in response group and still have an opportunity to "fix" the grammar and usage errors. Evidence of the shift toward a realization that revision involved meaning-advancing considerations is evident in an analysis of the second response group transcript. Use of the Faigley/Witte Taxonomy (1981) revealed only one suggestion for a surface level revision, and the instance shows how even the participants could poke fun at themselves for dwelling on surface features prematurely:

G. Good paper.

K. She went into her inner feelings.

R. You don't need much work on that! You told how you felt; that was real good.

J. You have some run-ons! (They all laugh)

R. You always say that!

G. We have our own grammarian here!

(They all laugh; then John comments that Salli's paper reminds him of a similar experience he had; they leave the grammar issues and reveal, through their comments, that Salli has struck a common theme. She has

"connected" with her audience).

Learning Log Entry 9. Shortly past the mid-way point in the semester, the teacher asked students to reflect on revision and to define it. Out of the sixteen students present the day this entry was written, exactly one-half still defined revision as having to do with correcting errors. However, the other eight, including three of the participants, defined revision in a broader context. Three of the participants wrote:

Salli

> In my opinion revision is a process in writing. Revision is checking to see if you have all the most important ideas down. It is also putting or arranging the ideas in order. You have to make sure you are showing and not telling. You also have to make sure you have secondary support, which is very important. After you have all these things, then it's time to correct grammatical errors and misspelled words.

Gerald

> I would like to reevaluate my personal thoughts on revision. After in-depth study and research, revision tome is not the process of correcting errors and changing sentences. Revision is a way of evaluating your thoughts in terms of analyzing a piece of writing. Revising can make a piece of writing more/less creative. This process is a way of altering work; making it more descriptive in a creative type of style.

John

Revision is a way to see what needs to be done in a paper. It gives you a second chance to see what you wrote. You may want to insert or delete information after rereading or rewriting your paper again. Revising also helps you to correct errors.

The participants' use of vocabulary in the sample was the subject of an earlier interview with Kay, reported below.

T. I've noticed that all the students I'm interviewing are using words that I don't think were in their vocabularies before; yet,I haven't given a test or anything like that, or even told the students to learn the words. What do you think is causing them to use new words?

K. They know what it really is now, so they're using it.

T. How do you think they know?

K. Cause they're doing it.

T. Cause they're doing it.

K. Cause if you're not doing it...you gotta' use it to really know it.

By the end of the semester, the need for meaning-advancing revision was a foregone conclusion. One non-participant wrote toward the end of the semester:

...Sometimes I look at a finished paper and I am amazed that I can write something so interesting, especially when I look at my "zero" draft and I can see how the

paper improved.

How did the students get to this point? How did it start? The beginning of growth began with what Sommers (1980) calls dissonance.

Dissonance

The first indicator of growth in revision manifested itself in a seemingly unusual way--through the students' frustration. By the fourth week of the semester the students had begun to develop an awareness of the need to examine their drafts for considerations other than mere surface errors. Students had begun to "re-see" their drafts, often as a result of comments made in response groups. They had begun to recognize the need for changes, but often did not know how to translate their awareness of the need for change onto the written page. This exchange took place during the second round of interviews, after the completion of Paper Two.

T. Which paper did you like best in response group?

K. Gerald's. I could have cried at the end. I was moved.

T. How does that make you feel about what you want to do with your own paper?

K. Makes me want to put some feeling in. I know how it is, but I don't know how to do it.

Kay's last statement, "I know how it is, but I don't know how to do it," is quite revealing. First of all, it shows that growth is occurring. At that point she had a concept of what good writing can be, and she knew what was called for within the parameters of

the assignment. The "dissonance" is there. Yet, because she had not quite figured out how to translate what she knew she should be doing onto the written page, her actual papers did not reveal the tremendous amount of progress she was making. She knew how far she had come, and the teacher knew how far she had come, but an examination of her written texts alone would not show how much progress she had made.

Learning Log Entry 10. By the end of the the third paper, the students had come to accept the dissonance as a natural part of producing a piece of writing. The third major paper was a collaborative effort. Students worked in groups to create a short paragraph on one phase of the writing process. Then they were taught how to use the school's word-processing program, and they entered their drafts into the computer. The teacher made comments on the printed drafts and returned them to the groups for more work. Finally, students were asked to produce a learning log entry, using the prompt, "describe the process of getting from the "zero draft" to the "gradebook draft." The participants' entries were as follows:

Gerald

> At first there was just a lot of ideas on how to write a paragraph dealing with revision. When all of our great ideas were combined into one, our group felt that we mastered the assignment just after writing the first draft.
>
> We were wrong! Our ideas were good, but we did too

much telling instead of showing. It took a while but we finally came up with a finished product that said what we wanted it to say. The group conquered the goal of getting the audience to understand what we already knew.

The reason I mentioned the group as many times is because it really was a group project. I almost forgot to give thanks to the Apple Computer!

Ronnie

To start off we, that is my group, thought up an idea. Everyone would think and say their idea. If the idea was any good we would write it down. The group finally wrote down one paragraph. Using the computer was really a big help. We could write sentences on scrap paper and add them on the computer. This way it saved more time. By putting our thoughts together the group came out with a pretty good paper.

John

The "0" draft showed our group what we weren't doing right. After Mrs. C. commented on our paper, she pointed out to us what we were missing in our paper. We needed to break down our paper enough to where someone below us would understand what is being said. We needed more secondary support statements to back up our topic. We finally did what was expected of us. I think we did an all right job.

Kay

I started out by thinking of how I did it myself (the writing process). I wrote down the different steps. Then when I handed in my zero, I realized when I got it back from you I had to go in more detail in certain things I said. I went and wrote more details to help what I said be understood more clearly.

Salli

The "0" draft was ideas off the top of our heads. We didn't really go deep into the process of revising. When we got our "0" computer copy back, we didn't really define revision. So we had to start over, taking some ideas from the "0" draft and coming up with new ideas. At a point, no one in our group knew what to say about revision. We worked hard on the final draft, and we made it.

Analysis of Learning Log 10. Each of the above entries ended with a statement indicating a feeling of success upon completion of the task. Yet, each mentioned some initial problems that were eventually worked out through the drafting process. It appears that by the ninth week of the semester, these students had made significant progress in being able to "seek dissonance of discovery, utilizing in their writing, as experienced writers do, the very difference between writing and speech--the possibility of revision" (Sommers, 1980, p. 387). While the students were not yet out of their house of mirrors, the distortions were not quite as pronounced, but, more importantly, the students seemed to know that

the distortions were necessary for finding their way through the mirrors.

Self-Monitoring

Another pattern which emerged from an analysis of the data collected was the participants' growth in their ability to self-monitor. According to Flower & Hayes (1980), good writers plan and revise as they go along, while poor writers write without self-monitoring feedback. At the beginning of the semester the students were doing very little self-monitoring, as would be expected at the beginning of a basic writing class. Learning logs, interviews, and observations provide evidence of the early lack of self-monitoring. However, by the end of the semester, a great deal of evidence had accumulated which led to the premise that students were actively self-monitoring themselves during their writing. Much of this evidence comes from transcripts of response groups.

During the first response group, the "authors" had little control over the discussion about their papers. They listened as others critiqued their work. The only instance of self-monitoring occurred when Kay interrupted herself to comment that she was describing too much in one area.

During the second response group, the participants interrupted themselves more frequently and seemed to be mentally planning revisions as they made self-directed comments about their papers. Examples follow:

Kay

K. I don't know if I should say this. (Continues reading) That doesn't make sense.

Gerald

G. (reading his paper) She never fussed at me when I would do something dishonest. (he stops himself) I need to give an example there.

John

J. (stops reading his paper and laughs) I left something out! (he tells the group a part of the story, which he later incorporates into the next draft)

By the final response group, the participants were taking charge of the discussion about their own papers. During the final response group the participants performed in a task-oriented, business-like manner, with little of the hesitancy and playfulness evident in the first two response sessions. The students were still reading their papers aloud, but were actually making more comments about their own papers than the group members did.

Writer-Based to Reader-Based

Not only were the participants increasing their ability to self-monitor, but also they were taking their audience into consideration much more as they monitored their own writing. The interviews, response groups, and learning logs support Flower's (1981) contention that teachers can help students increase the amount of reader-based planning they do, another indicator of growth in writing. The interviews indicated that after being in a response group for two or three sessions, the participants had learned to respond to their own writing as well as to that of other

writers. The final interview clearly indicated that the students had been partially "weaned" away from their dependence on the response group, but still carried the experience of it around with them. They had developed a sense of audience, as well as the ability to self-monitor.

Kay's Interview Two. Kay's second interview revealed that before the semester was halfway finished, the participants, without direct instruction in "what is audience?", had begun to develop that sense. This entry is also representative of how much the participants' confidence in their ability to write had increased:

T. So you're beginning to read your own papers...

K. Like I said Friday (in her learning log), I'm trying to be the audience when I read my papers.

T. How did you get the idea to do that?

K. From being in a group. I hate going and reading in front of a group. I mean, I don't mind here (in response group); I'd like to have a good paper when I read my papers. It's like someone else's paper and I'm trying to think of the negative and positive.

T. Did you do that before?

K. No, (emphatically), before, I never really thought of myself as the audience.

T. That's interesting. We haven't really talked about audience a lot in class, yet. Have we talked about it at all?

K. I don't know. Maybe not.

T. But it was more the experience of the response group? You can't remember anything I've said about audience?

K. I think you brought it up once.

T. Is it that from being in a response group you've seen how others became the audience and how you became the audience for others? Now from that experience you're able to be your own audience? (She nods). What other changes?

K. More feeling. You told me to make you feel like you were there. To show instead of tell.

T. I think you did a lot of that (in the paper under discussion.)

K. I tried, but it was hard. It takes a lot of thinking. Boy, you set there and think and think and it feels like your brain...It feels like I'm using parts of my brain I've never used before. It feels like half of my brain was sleeping for a long time and now I'm starting to use it.

Final Interview Session. The final interview session was ripe with participant comments about increased self-monitoring practices. The interviews also indicate the degree to which the participants had increased their awareness of audience. The following interchange took place between the teacher and John during the final interview.

John

T. Do you try to become somebody else when you're reading?

J. I become an authority on the subject. Every time when I write it, I'm the student writing it. And when I read it, I'm kinda like--what--a teacher? You know. You try to divorce yourself from yourself a little bit and as a teacher I see what the student is doing wrong.

T. We haven't used the response group lately. Do you feel like you can do without that now?

J. Yeah, I'm my own response group now. After the first couple of times I see how I could have helped myself by being the judge of my own paper and I put myself in other peoples' place to see how they would feel about the paper. So I know what they want to tell me, so I go from there.

T. So there's something there inside now saying the things you've heard others say, whether it was the teacher or people in your response group. Are you beginning to say things you think they would say?

J. Yeah, I'm just picturing what they might tell me. Like I hear Gerald's voice...I should because my first paper when they jumped all over me--I'll never forget that. I picture Gerald being right here (pointing) and Salli on the other side of me and just hearing both of them coming at me telling me what I needed to do.

T. More than the teacher?

J. Yeah, so I do know what I'm doing wrong.

T. Do you think it would have been as effective if the

teacher had talked to you about those changes?

J. I don't think so because from the students' point of view, we can relate better to one another, but the teacher has been around more and might (as well) be talking French to me!

The voice inside the head that John heard became the basis for probing the other participants about their "voices."

Kay

T. John said something interesting yesterday when we talked. He said, "when I read my own papers, now, I hear Gerald's voice."

K. Oh yeah...Yeah, I've had the same thing, but when I read over mine, there's someone, but it's more like <u>you.</u> I put myself in your place and read over it and then the paper's talking back.

In just a span of three and one half months of instruction, there were many indicators that growth in writing had occurred in the class. To what did the participants attribute their new skills in writing?

<u>Instructional Experiences</u>

Overwhelming, the data point to response groups as a major factor in the participants' growth in revision skill. Two other experiences participants (as well as the other students) indicated had "made a difference" in their learning were student-teacher mini-conferences during the drafting stage and approaching writing as a process or, what they described as "the steps." Three sources

of data were used to determine what the students perceived as "making a difference" in their improved revision skills: interviews, learning logs, and a final ranking of activities students had mentioned earlier in their learning logs.

Interviews. The third round of interviews occurred after Paper Four was done. The participant-observer interviewed Salli and John together and Kay and Ronnie together. Gerald was interviewed alone. These interviews focused on how the students' processes had changed and what had been responsible for the changes. In prior interviews, the participants had also spoken about how important the response groups had been to them.

Salli and John

T. I want to know what we have done in class that's caused you to do differently, now. What had had the most difference to you? Response group? When I walk around? Does that make you nervous?

S. No, not really.

J. I don't pay that much attention to it. It don't bother me.

S. I'll pick out two--response groups and the red pen. In response group it helped me to share my paper with other people, get their opinions, and the red pen helped me go through and pick out my mistakes.

T. ...John I noticed the most interesting thing in your second response group. You were doing responding to your own paper. Did just reading it for an audience cause you

to see things you hadn't seen before?

J. Yeah, 'cause when I was writing, I just put all my ideas down, but I didn't organize. Like I didn't link the sections and ideas to another and when I was reading it for the audience I saw how it sounded 'cause when I was reading it to myself, it sounded all right, but when I was reading it to other people, I saw that I had a lot of mistakes.

Learning Logs. The final learning log entry asked that students describe the writing course as if they were describing it for someone who intended to take the class and asked, "What do you do in that class?" The sheer length of these entries attests to the development of fluency and confidence. The students were given approximately the same amount of time to complete these entries as they had been given to complete the early ones where they wrote only a few sentences. One non-participant wrote:

> Well, first of all, Ms. C. gives us instructions on how to do a particular thing and then she explains it rather careful. On the things that she tells us to do, we usually do a little prewriting on it to see if we're in the right direction. Once we know we're going right, we begin to put all our ideas together to form a draft. Later on, we begin to get help from each other in response groups. Response groups help us to decide on correct grammar, things that needed to be added or taken away. It helps us to become a better writer. Before any

worked is passed in, believe me, it has been written several times. The most helpful thing is being in the response group.

Salli

Many things go on in this writing class. One of the most helpful things that we do in the class is response groups. This is when about three to four people get in a group and discuss each other's papers. They help each other to find mistakes in each paper. They also help the individual see if his paper is organized well. Another thing we do in here is go over our paper and correct it in red ink. This helps the student see his mistakes. We also have an editing day where we pass our paper around in the class so that they can pick out the grammatical errors in the paper. We also wrote a group paper on the word processor. This is fun because you get to work on a computer. Another important thing is that Mrs. C. walks around the class and helps the students while they are writing their paper. All of these things are very important things that take place in this writing class. The one I like is the response groups...

John

This course involves a lot of writing. A person learns how to be more open with fellow classmates because of a system called "response groups." This system allows a person to read his paper aloud and share his good

points and bad. Response groups have been the most helpful to me because they let me read my paper aloud and other classmates comment on my work. They tell me how to correct my errors. A person communicates better with other students. We go through different stages of the writing process and we write quite a few papers. Overall, the class is useful because everyone should know how to write and this class teaches you.

Other students commented that the mini-conferences with their teacher had been helpful. Many of the students commented on the "step-by-step" approach to writing a paper. Prior interviews with the participants also revealed that different students benefited in different ways from the classroom approaches, with response groups, mini-conferences, and a step-by-step approach to paper development leading the list. A final ranking of activities corroborated the other data.

Student Ranking of Class Activities. After the completion of the the last learning log entry, the teacher compiled a list of activities which had been mentioned in the final entries. The students were asked to rank the activities from one to ten, with one being the most helpful and ten being the least helpful for learning how to revise drafts.

Four out of the five participants ranked Response groups as most helpful. From the class as a whole, eight chose Response Groups as most helpful and seventeen (17) chose either Teacher Walking Around the Room, Informal Conferences With the Teacher, or

Teacher Asking Questions. Clearly some students preferred teacher-led activities, while others preferred peer activities.

Implications

Research Methodology

Researchers continually search for ways to overcome the difficulty of measuring growth in writing. One way growth can be measured over a short period of time is to examine indicators of growth in writing. One way to determine an indication of growth is to examine types of revisions writers make in their texts by means of revision taxonomies. The present study used a revision taxonomy (Faigley/Witte, 1981) in a different way. The taxonomy was used to analyze response groups for evidence that students were developing an awareness of the need to make meaning-advancing changes before they were actually able to demonstrate their growth on the written page. Kim's statement, "I know how it is, but I don't know how to do it," revealed more about her writing growth at that point in the semester than her papers did. Using a revision taxonomy for analysis of response groups has implications for other researchers.

Another promising research tool for qualitative research studies is the learning log. Traditional sources of data in qualitative research studies have been observations and interviews. While written records have been used for qualitative research in literate societies, these records have not always been focused on the area under investigation. Learning logs can provide a written record that is focused on a particular area of investigation. It is recommended by the present researcher that learning logs be

considered as a valuable source of data collection in ethnographic studies undertaken in school settings.

Classroom Practices

Many of the classroom practices uncovered in this study are those recommended by the National Writing Project. Two practices which the data supported as "having made a difference" in the learning process were response groups and teacher-student conferences during the drafting stage.

Response Groups. The present study suggests that response groups are a major source of help for students in improving revision ability. Yet, not enough research has been conducted on response groups to assure that they are used to maximum effectiveness. More research is needed to determine the best ways for response groups to be conducted. Further analysis of response groups sessions should be conducted with varying age groups. Further studies should be done to determine whether or not the use of revision taxonomies for response group analysis is as promising a technique for measuring growth in revision ability as the present study suggests.

Carkhuff Method. Teacher feedback during the drafting stage of writing was a major instructional technique used by the teacher in the present study. It has been suggested that writing teachers who conference with their students should be trained in the Carkhuff method (Truax & Carkoff, 1967) of counseling and psychotherapy (Spear, 1982), yet there have been few reports of its actual use in the writing classroom. During the course of the

study, the teacher, on reading Spear's (1982) article, "Empathy and Re-vision," realized that the tool she was relying on in her mini-conferences was her training in the Carkhuff method. The value of this tool has implications for future research, as well as for teacher training and classroom practices.

The present study yielded a rare glimpse of how improving a skill as personal and elusive as writing unfolded for five students. The study also yielded possibilities for future researchers: revision taxonomies can become a source for analyzing response groups; written records such as learning logs are a valuable source of data for descriptive research; and the Carkuff method should be explored for inclusion into training programs for writing teachers.

References

Bartholomae, D. (1980). The study of error. College Composition & Communication, 31, 253-269.

Bridwell, L.S. (1980). Revising strategies in twelfth grade students' transactional writing. Research in the Teaching of English, 14, 197-222.

Caplan, R. (1982). Showing-writing: A training program to help students be specific. In G. Camp (Ed.) Teaching writing/Essays from the bay area writing project. Berkeley, CA: The University of California (available through Boyton/Cook).

Dawe, C.W., and Dornan, E. (1984). One to one: resources for conferenced-centered writing (2nd ed.). New York: Little, Brown, & Co.

Diesing, P. (1983). Ethnography. The English Record. 34. 4. Buffalo, New York: The New York State English Council. 2-4.

Emig, J. (1979). The composing processes of twelfth graders. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.

Faigley, L., and Witte, S. (1981). Analyzing revision. College Composiltion and Communication, 32, 400-414.

Flower, L. (1979). Writer-based prose: A cognitive basis for problems in writing, College English, 41, 19-37.

Flower, L. (1981). Revising writer-based prose. Basic Writing. 3, 62-74.

Flower, L., and Hayes, J. (1980). The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem. College Composition and Communication, 31 21-32.

Friss, D. (1982). Writing class: Teacher and students writing together. In G. Camp (Ed.), Teaching writing: Essays from the bay area writing project. Berkley, CA: The University of California (available through Boyton/Cook).

Graves, D. (1981). A new look at research on writing. In Shirley Haley-James, (Ed.), Perspectives on writing in Grades 1-8. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

Hayes, J.R. and Flower, L.S. (1980). Identifying the organization of writing processes. In L.W. Gregg and E. R. Steinberg (Eds.), Cognitive processes in writing, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kantor, K.J., Kirby, D.R., and Goetz, J.P. (1981). Research in context: Ethnographic studies in English education, Research in the Teaching of English, 15, 293-309.

LeCompte, M.D., and Goetz, J.P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. Review of Educational Research, 1982, 52 31-60.

Murray, D. (1982) The maker's eye: Revising your own manuscripts, In D. Murray, Learning by Teaching: Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching. Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc. 88-71.

Perl, S. (1979). The composing processes of unskilled college writers. Research in the Teaching of English, 13, 317-336.

Pollard, R. (1983). Interviewing strategies for researching composing. The English Record. 34. 4. Buffalo, NY: The New York State English Council, 12-14.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). The ethnographic interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Spear, KI (1982) Empathy and re-vision, In R.A. Sudol (Ed.) Revising: New essays for teachers of writing. Urbana,Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English. 156-162.

Spindler, G. (1982). Doing the ethnography of schooling. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Sommers, N. (1980). Revision strategies of student writers and experienced adult writers. College Composition and Communication, 31, 378-388.

Truax, C.B. and Carkoff, R.R. (1967). Toward effective counseling and psychotheraphy: Training and practice. Chicago, Ill: Aldine Publishing Co.

Wilcox, K. (1982). Ethnography as a methodology and its application to the study of schooling: A review. In G. Spindler, Doing the ethnography of schooling. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.